

When I was the county executive of New Castle County, Delaware, we had as many as seven different county employees at different times deployed overseas, many of them police officers called up for their National Guard service—folks who are the epitome of serving at home and serving abroad. So it is with a very personal sense of the needs and the challenges when I thank those employers who recognize that even when they are not at their desks, even when they are not contributing to their employer, our National Guard members are making a vital contribution to our community and to our country.

Tomorrow morning I am going to the Pentagon, where I will talk with leaders there about critical needs in an age of ongoing budget austerity. One of the priorities I am fighting for is a responsible investment in our National Guard. These heroes deserve more than our gratitude, they deserve our rock-solid commitment to ensuring they have the resources they need to do their jobs.

The National Guard plays a unique dual role in our security—as first responders and as a reserve force for foreign conflicts. We have to make sure they have the equipment and support for both their military missions and their domestic missions.

I am proud this year the President signed into law legislation that would give the Chief of the National Guard Bureau a seat at the table, a seat on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I was glad to work to help build bipartisan support for this bill because I believe the Joint Chiefs need someone at the table who has seen the full capabilities and range of operations and the unique challenges and resources of the National Guard firsthand.

So 376 years after its founding, the National Guard continues to grow and evolve to meet the security challenges of the United States in the 21st century. I believe the Guard of the future must continue to fulfill both sides of their vital dual mission. Additionally, it must be a place where highly skilled soldiers and airmen can continue to serve their country while also working in and serving civilian communities. The Guard can and should be a bridge between the military and civilian response to threats facing the United States, not the least of which are cyber attacks and terrorism.

On this anniversary, the National Guard remains essential to the safety and security of Americans at home and abroad, and today I would like to thank the soldiers and airmen of the Delaware National Guard as well as the entire National Guard family at home and abroad for their service and dedication to our country. Thank you, and happy birthday.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

THE FISCAL CLIFF

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, today I rise because middle-class families are counting on the House of Representatives to do the right thing between now and the end of the year, which is just 19 days away. The House needs to pass the middle-class tax cuts we sent them back in July.

Families need help. When we talk about the fiscal cliff, the most important one is what families are struggling with every day, and we have just 19 days until the taxes on middle-class families will go up by an average of \$2,200 if the House of Representatives doesn't act. We need to make sure that 98 percent of the American public is protected from tax increases. As we know, we passed the Middle Class Tax Cut Act on July 25. So far, the House has not acted. Nineteen days. They have 19 days until the end of this year in order to act. Time is running out.

Now, we know there is a larger discussion going on that is incredibly important—how we put together a deficit reduction plan for our country, a long-term plan for fiscal solvency and for our economy. By the way, we will never get out of debt with close to 12 million people out of work, so we better be focused on jobs and the economy, as I am each and every day.

We know we need a larger plan, but when we look at the three legs of the deficit reduction stool that everybody talks about, there has been action on two of them. There needs to be action on the third as we go forward to put together the final plan. The first step was an agreement we made last year to cut spending by about \$1 trillion. So that was the first piece, the spending cut reduction. Secondly, we needed to find savings in Medicare, which has lengthened the Medicare trust fund by 8 years. We know there is more that can be done as we look at savings going forward. We passed over \$700 billion in savings by protecting and strengthening benefits for seniors by cutting overpayments to insurance companies and making other reforms to strengthen the system and create more efficiencies.

We have seen step 1 on spending reductions of \$1 trillion. We have seen step 1 on "entitlements," as we speak of it, which is Medicare savings coming the right way, not by cutting benefits or raising the Medicare age, which I strongly oppose but, instead, by creating savings by cutting overpayments to insurance companies and other efficiencies. But what happens on the third leg of the stool, which is the requirement that the wealthiest among us come to the table and be part of the solution on revenue? That is the third leg of the stool. We continue to see no willingness to take action there.

We find ourselves in a situation where in 19 days the average American will see their taxes go up by, on average, \$2,200 because the House of Representatives has been holding middle-class families hostage to their own pol-

itics. What are we talking about when we talk about \$2,200? I asked folks around Michigan: What does that mean to you? One constituent said that is 4 months' groceries. Four months of feeding her family is what we are talking about if the House of Representatives does not act.

Mr. President, \$2,200 would buy 650 gallons of gas. For the average commuter going back and forth to work every day, that gets them back and forth to work for 3 years on the tax increase that middle-class families are facing if the House does not act.

Mr. President, \$2,200 will buy families in Michigan 550 gallons of milk for their families. We are talking about a lot of money that is at stake for families.

In many cases that number is higher than \$2,200, and House Republicans are holding families across this country hostage at Christmastime over a fight about whether millionaires and billionaires in this country should pay a little bit more to solve our long-term deficit problem.

It is unbelievable to me that we continue to see this kind of inaction coming from the House of Representatives. We all know this can be done in just a few moments. We can send a very strong message to 98 percent of American families, 97 percent of small businesses, that they can go into the Christmas season knowing they are going to continue to get tax cuts in the new year.

I can assure you, in times when families are struggling now, when they want to provide a good Christmas for their families, we are seeing things like layaway—layaway is back because families are having to use a longer time to pay for toys and clothes and other things for their children for Christmas. Mr. President, \$2,200 is a lot of money. There is a lot of uncertainty right now because the House of Representatives has not acted. It is time to get this done.

Everybody says they support the bill we passed. We have a growing chorus of colleagues on the Republican side of the aisle in the Senate and in the House—we have business leaders and people across the country—who all agree we are never going to be able to address our deficit reduction problems without those who are wealthiest among us helping to solve the problem. That is all this is about.

The House needs to get this done. Then we know there is a larger piece. All three legs of the deficit reduction chair need to be addressed, but now the only one where nothing has been done is asking people who are most blessed economically to chip in a little bit more.

RIGHT-TO-WORK LAWS

If I might add one more thing that relates to something else happening in Michigan that goes to the heart of the issue about whether we are going to have a middle class in this country, and that is what the Governor and the

Republican State legislature have done in passing the most divisive piece of legislation I can remember in my lifetime in Michigan. It is called right to work. It is really a right to have a race to the bottom. It is not about economics, it is about politics, plain and simple.

Instead of coming together and doing the right thing, we see the State legislature pursuing a political attack. Over and over, families in my State and across America, middle-class families, are being asked to sacrifice, to bear the burden for whatever is happening. They are fed up, and they have every right to be.

There are huge crowds at the Michigan State Capitol Building in Lansing showing how frustrated, how angry people are that one more time, in an age where we have Citizens United and the Supreme Court saying corporations can give not only unlimited dollars to campaigns but secret money; in an age when the House of Representatives in Washington is willing to protect millionaires from chipping in to solve our deficit problem at all costs, even holding middle-class families hostage—over and over again, working people are saying: What is going on here? We will not have an economy if we do not have a middle class, if people do not have money in their pockets to be able to buy things, to be able to drive the economy, to be able to take care of their families.

In Michigan it is one more blow to the whole process of whether we are going to have voices of working people at the table in the workplace able to effectively negotiate good wages, good benefits, safe working conditions, and know that everybody in the workplace who benefits from that is going to chip in to be able to make sure that continues.

We know all across the country we can either have a race to the bottom or a race to the top. When we see wages going down in places where this kind of legislation has been on the books across the country, we know what has been done in Michigan is going to be one more step in creating that race to the bottom. We see wages for union and nonunion workers go down when we have that kind of a race to the bottom. We see health benefits and pensions decrease. We see lower consumer spending because middle-class families have less money in their pocket.

These kinds of laws hurt families. It is not about economics or freedom, it is about raw politics. Workers need to have confidence they will have a voice in the workplace and they will have a decent wage and benefits they can count on to be able to have a good life for themselves and their families.

That is really what this is all about in so many ways, where families are under attack right now. Middle-class people, trying to hold it together, people trying to figure out how to get into the middle class, who have been knocked down over and over. It is time

to stop saying the words “middle class” and actually believe and act as if it is important to our country—because it is. It is essential if we are going to have a quality of life and an economy and have families who know that the American dream is not just a couple of words, but they have the ability to create the American dream for their families.

We have 19 days for the House of Representatives to pass the middle-class tax cuts that we sent to them in July, July 25; 19 days before families see their taxes go up and they believe one more time, at least in the House, that they do not get what is happening to families.

I strongly urge the Speaker and Republican leadership to bring up this bill right away, get it done, and let families know they will have economic certainty—at least related to their taxes going into the new year.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

THANKING SISTER SHEILA LYNE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, if the rough and tumble of Chicago politics is not where you would expect to find a slightly built Catholic nun, you have never met Sister Sheila Lyne. Sister Sheila has been an icon in Chicago health care for almost half a century. For nearly 10 years in the 1990s she made history as Chicago's public health commissioner.

For 15 years before her work as Chicago's top public health officer and for another dozen years afterwards, this smart, visionary courageous woman also served as president and CEO of Mercy Hospital & Medical Center, a legendary institution that has helped care for poor families on the South Side of Chicago since before the Civil War. As public health commissioner, Sister Sheila was never afraid to tackle the powerful. Her decisions were based on conscience, and an iron will. She was once arrested for ignoring a judge's order to test every child in a Chicago public school for lead poisoning because she believed the edict was unnecessarily broad and could hurt children and deplete her department's limited resources. She was out of jail 2 hours later.

The first time she took over as president of Mercy Hospital, in 1976, Mercy was bleeding money and on the verge of closing. Sister Sheila's business savvy and innovative management ideas helped put the hospital back in the black. In 2000, following a series of management blunders, Mercy was losing \$40 million a year and once again about to go down for the count. Sister Sheila stepped down as Chicago's public health commissioner and returned as Mercy's president and CEO to lead the hospital's turnaround effort. Once again, she succeeded with a series of shrewd business decisions, innovative reforms, and determination. A year

ago, Sister Sheila helped engineer the sale of Mercy Hospital to Trinity Health, the tenth-largest health system in the Nation and the fourth-largest Catholic health system.

Last week, at the age of, as she says, “76½”—she insists including the half—Sister Sheila announced that she will step down as president and CEO of Mercy Hospital as soon as her successor can be named. While she will remain with Mercy as senior adviser to Mercy Foundation, the hospital's philanthropic arm, her departure as Mercy's president and CEO will bring to a close one of the most remarkable careers in Chicago health care in our lifetimes.

Sheila Lyne was born and raised on the South Side of Chicago, one of three children of Irish immigrants who met in America. She attended Little Flower Elementary School and Mercy High School. She joined the Sisters of Mercy, a Catholic religious order, in 1953. She earned a master's degree in psychiatric nursing from St. Xavier College and an MBA from the University of Chicago and served three years as an assistant professor at the University of Iowa before joining Mercy Hospital in 1970. In 1976 she became Mercy's president and CEO.

In 1991, Mayor Richard M. Daley appointed her city health commissioner—the first woman and the first non-physician ever to hold that job. The department's responsibilities ran the gamut from inspecting restaurants, to monitoring and controlling epidemics, and protecting the public against the spread of infectious diseases. Its clinics receive a million patient visits a year and are the “family doctor” to more Chicagoans than any other single entity.

HIV and AIDS were taking a devastating and rising toll on the city and the nation, and gay and lesbian groups protested Sister Sheila's appointment strongly, fearing she would allow Church policies to dictate public health decisions. Sister Sheila surprised her critics by taking on the cause of fighting AIDS, increasing care and prevention funding from \$4 million to \$40 million and promoting aggressive, even controversial prevention efforts. She gained national acclaim for her innovative programs to improve the health of poor women and children.

When she learned that the department had no way to know which areas of the city faced particular problems, she set up an epidemiology department. Data from that department helped her department to focus and improve its efforts. She visited elementary schools, pregnancy crisis centers, welfare clinics, homeless shelters and senior centers throughout the city, listening to people's stories in order to better understand their lives—and always looking for better ways to combat the city's health challenges.